

In 2001, the United States Congress re-authorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, "No Child Left Behind" (NCLB). NCLB is the signature education initiative of the Bush administration. The Act calls for minimum achievement expectations for all students by 2013. Among these expectations are requirements that all students graduate from high school, all students demonstrate "adequate yearly progress" toward meeting achievement expectations, all students attend school daily, and student population subgroups meet similar achievement expectations as those expected of the aggregate population of a school division. NCLB is the first piece of legislation tying student performance in core academic programs to federal funding. Heretofore, federal funding of education programs with certain achievement expectations had been limited to Career and Technical Education Programs and Head Start initiatives. NCLB allows for the consolidation of the various federal grants in order to focus resources on addressing specific initiatives to improve student achievement.

Stafford County Public Schools' application takes advantage of program flexibility through a consolidated application. The Stafford County Public Schools are eligible for \$1.72 million in federal funding under NCLB. The Stafford County School Board requested and received an appropriation in this amount from the Board of Supervisors. Approximately \$1.4 million were anticipated and budgeted for FY 2002-2003 and are allocated primarily to Title I Reading programs and Class Size Reduction. Additional funding, as appropriated in August 2002, will support the addition of mathematics specialists in targeted schools, English as a Second Language instruction, and professional development activities to assist teachers in meeting the needs of struggling learners.

Key Provisions of NCLB

To be eligible for continued funding under NCLB, school divisions must meet certain achievement expectations annually as agreed to by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) and the Commonwealth of Virginia. Virginia and USDOE have not yet reached final agreement as to those standards. For school year 2002-2003, each local school division must analyze its own achievement data and set standards based on those

data. Attached are Stafford County Public School's objectives for this year. Below are the key provisions of NCLB legislation and an explanation of each.

Adequate Yearly Progress

The division and individual schools must demonstrate "adequate yearly progress" toward meeting achievement expectations as agreed to by the Commonwealth and USDOE. These include daily attendance, graduation rate and academic achievement in each of four population sub-groups (defined below). Schools eligible for Title I funds based on the number of economically disadvantaged students are held to higher standards. Such sanctions may include loss of federal funding. Currently, no Stafford school is at risk of sanctions, nor is one expected to be.

Achievement of Student Population Sub-Groups

Four population sub-groups are defined in NCLB. In contrast to Virginia's Standards of Learning Assessment program that accredits schools based on the aggregate achievement of its students, NCLB looks to the population sub-groups making up the total enrollment of a school. The population sub-groups include students who are economically disadvantaged, students with disabilities, students for whom English is a second language, and students of diverse ethnicity. Stafford's application includes a needs assessment which addresses each of these population groups. NCLB requires that each division address the needs of the lowest performing sub-group and base its plan on the achievement of that sub-group.

Student Attendance

NCLB requires that student attendance at school improve annually. Stafford's daily attendance rate is among the highest in the Commonwealth. The Commonwealth recognizes that all Virginia school divisions generally have high daily attendance rates and is currently negotiating an attendance rate that does not unfairly penalize divisions that exceed 90% in daily attendance.

Student Graduation Rate

NCLB expects that 100% of the high school population will graduate. Stafford's current dropout rate of less than 2% is among the best in the Commonwealth. NCLB does recognize and encourages schools to implement alternative plans for those students who are not successful in a traditional high school. Such programs may include General Equivalency Diplomas, Certificates of Completion, and Individual Student Alternative Education Plans that include a career and technical education component. Stafford currently has such programs in place and will continue to expand them.

Correlation to Local Initiatives

NCLB validates the division-wide school improvement effort initiated by Stafford County Public Schools in 1999. Our current six-year plan, adopted by the school board in 2001, addresses four components: Student Attendance and Achievement, School Climate and Safety, Professional Development of Staff, and School and Community Relations. The School Board requires individual schools to develop a comprehensive annual improvement plan targeting each of these four areas. The Stafford County School Board correctly anticipated that our schools would be held to higher standards and established a process through which schools would achieve and exceed expectations as required by the Commonwealth and the United States Department of Education. Stafford County Public Schools' consolidated plan exceeds state and federal expectations and leaves all other school divisions behind.